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THE
OLD MAN IN THE CORNER
TRAVELS THE MYSTERY OF
BRUDENELL COURT
AND THE
TYTHERTON CASE

BY
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THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER
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THE MYSTERY OF BRUDENELL COURT

“**D**ID you ever make up your mind about that Brudenell Court affair?” the Old Man in the Corner said to me that day.

“No,” I replied. “As far as I am concerned, the death of Colonel Forburg has remained a complete mystery.”

“You don’t think,” he insisted, “that Morley Thrall was guilty?”

“Well,” I said, “I don’t know what to think.”

“Then don’t do it,” he rejoined, with a chuckle. “If you don’t know what to think, then it’s best not to think at all. At any rate, wait until I have told you exactly what did happen—not as it was reported in the newspapers, but in the sequence in which the various incidents occurred.

“On Christmas Eve, last year, while the family were at dinner, there was a sudden commotion and cries of ‘Stop, thief!’ issuing from the back premises of Brudenell Court, the country seat of a certain Colonel Forburg. The butler ran in excitedly to say that Julia Mason, one of the maids, was drawing down the blinds in one of the first-floor rooms, when she saw a man fiddling with the shutters of the French window in the smoking-room downstairs. She at once gave the alarm,

whereupon the man bolted across the garden in the direction of the five-acre field. The colonel and his stepson, as well as two male guests who were dining with them, immediately jumped up and hurried out to help in the chase. It was a very dark night, people were running to and fro, and for a few moments there was a great deal of noise and confusion, through which two pistol shots in close succession were distinctly heard.

“The ladies—amongst whom was Miss Monica Glenluce, the colonel’s stepdaughter—had remained in the dining-room, and the dinner was kept waiting, pending the return of the gentlemen. They straggled in one by one, all except the colonel. The ladies eagerly asked for news. The gentlemen could not say much; the night was very dark, and they had just waited about outside until some of the indoor men who had given chase came back with the news that the thief had been caught.

“This news was confirmed by young Glenluce, Miss Monica’s brother, who was the last to return. He had actually witnessed the capture. The thief had bolted straight across the five-acre meadow, but doubled back before he reached the stables, turned sharply to the right through the kitchen garden, and then jumped over the boundary wall of the grounds into the lane beyond, where he fell straight into the arms of the local constable who happened to be passing by.

“Young Glenluce had great fun out of the chase; he had guessed the man’s purpose, and instead of running after him across the meadow, he had gone round

it, and had reached the boundary wall only a few seconds after the thief had scaled it. There was some talk about the gun-shots that had been heard, and every one supposed that Colonel Forburg, who was a violent-tempered man, had snatched up a revolver before giving chase to the burglar, and had taken a pot-shot at him; it was fortunate that he had missed him.

“The incident would then have been closed, and the interrupted dinner proceeded with, but for the fact that the host had not yet returned. Nothing was thought of this at first, for it was generally supposed that the colonel had been kept talking by one of his men, or perhaps by the constable who had effected the capture; it was only when close on half an hour had gone by that Miss Monica became impatient. She got the butler to telephone both to the stables and the lodge, but the colonel had not been seen at either place, either during or after the incident with the burglar; communication with the police station brought the same result; nothing had been seen or heard of the colonel.

“Genuinely alarmed now, Miss Monica gave orders for the grounds to be searched; it was just possible that the colonel had fallen whilst running, and was lying somewhere helpless in the dark, perhaps unconscious. Every one began recalling those pistol shots, and a vague sense of tragedy spread over the entire house. Monica blamed herself for not having thought of all this before.

“A search party went out at once; for a while stable-lanterns and electric-torches gleamed through the darkness and past the shrubberies. Then suddenly there

were calls for help, the wandering lights centered in one spot, somewhere in the middle of the five-acre meadow near the big elm tree. Obviously there had been an accident. Monica ran to the front door, followed by all the guests. Through the darkness a group of men were seen slowly wending their way towards the house; one man was running ahead; it was the chauffeur. Young Glenluce, half guessing that something sinister had occurred, went forward to meet him.

“What had happened was indeed as tragic as it was mysterious; the search party had found the colonel lying full-length in the meadow. His clothes were saturated with blood; he had been shot in the breast, and was apparently dead. Close by a revolver had been picked up. It was impossible to keep the terrible event from Miss Monica. Her brother broke the news to her. She bore up with marvelous calm, and it was she who at once gave the necessary orders to have her stepfather’s body taken upstairs and to fetch both the doctor and the police.

“In the meanwhile, the guests had gone back into the house. They stood about in groups, awestruck and whispering; they did not care to finish their dinner, or to go up to their rooms, as in all probability they would be required when the police came to make inquiries. Monica and Gerald Glenluce had gone to sit in the smoking-room.

“It was the most horrible Christmas Eve any one in that house had ever experienced.

“Murder committed from any other motive than that of robbery,” the Old Man in the Corner went on after

a moment's pause, "always excites the interest of the public. There is nearly always an element of mystery about it, and it invariably suggests possibilities of romance. In this case, of course, there was no question of robbery. After Colonel Forburg fell, shot, as it transpired, at close range and full in the breast, his clothes were left untouched; there was loose silver in his trousers pocket, a few treasury notes in his letter-case, and he was wearing a gold watch and chain and a fine pearl stud.

"The motive of the crime was therefore enmity or revenge, and here the police were at once confronted with a great difficulty; not, mind you, the difficulty of finding a man who hated the colonel sufficiently to kill him, but that of choosing among his many enemies one who was most likely to have committed such a terrible crime. He was the best-hated man in the county. Known as 'Re-mount Forburg,' he was generally supposed to have made his fortune in some shady transactions connected with the Re-mount Department of the War Office during the Boer War, more than twenty years ago.

"His first wife was said to have died of a broken heart, and he had no children of his own. Some ten years ago he had married a widow with two young children. She had a considerable fortune of her own, and when she died she left it in trust for her children, but she directed that her husband should be the sole guardian of Monica and Gerald until they came of age; moreover, she left him the interest of the whole of the capital amount for so long as they were in his house

and unmarried. After his death the money would revert unconditionally to them.

“Of course it was a foolish, one might say a criminal will, and one obviously made under the influence of her husband. One can only suppose that the poor woman had died without knowing anything of ‘Remount Forburg’s’ character. Since her death, his violent temper and insufferable arrogance had alienated from the children every friend they ever had. Only some chance acquaintances ever came anywhere near Brudenell Court now. Naturally every one said that the colonel’s behavior was part of a scheme for keeping suitors away from his stepdaughter Monica, who was a very beautiful girl. As for Gerald Glenluce, Monica’s younger brother, he had been sadly disfigured when he was a schoolboy through a fall against a sharp object that had broken his nose and somewhat mysteriously deprived him of the sight of one eye.

“Those who had suffered most from Colonel Forburg’s violent tempers declared that the boy’s face had been smashed in by a blow from a stick, and that the stick had been wielded by his stepfather. Be that as it may, Gerald Glenluce had remained, in consequence of this disfigurement, a shy, retiring, silent boy, who neither played games, nor rode to hounds, and had no idea how to handle a gun. But he was essentially the colonel’s favorite; where Forburg was harsh and dictatorial with every one else, he would always unbend to Gerald, and was almost gentle and affectionate towards him. Perhaps an occasional twinge of remorse

had something to do with this soft side of his disagreeable character.

“Certainly that softness did not extend to Monica. He made the girl’s life unbearable with his violence, which amounted almost to brutality. The girl hated him, and openly said so. Her one desire was to get away from Brudenell Court by any possible means. But, owing to her mother’s foolish will, she had no money of her own, and the few friends she had were not sufficiently rich, or sufficiently disinterested, to give her a home away from her stepfather; nor would the colonel, for a matter of that, have given his consent to her living away from him.

“As for marriage, it was a difficult question. Young men fought shy of any family connection with ‘Remount Forburg.’ The latter’s nickname was bad enough, but there were rumors of secrets more unavowable still in the past history of the colonel. Certain it is that though Monica excited admiration wherever she went, and though one or two of her admirers did go to the length of openly courting her, the courtship never matured into an actual engagement; something or other always occurred to cool off the ardor of the wooers. There would, perhaps, be a scene of fond farewell, but Monica would always understand that the farewell was a definite one, and, as she was an intelligent as well as a fascinating girl, she put two and two together, and observed that these farewell scenes were invariably preceded by a long interview behind closed doors between her stepfather and her admirer of the moment.

“Small wonder, then, that she hated the colonel. She hated him as much as she loved her brother. A great affection had, especially of late, developed between these two; it was a love born of an affinity of trouble and sense of injustice; on Gerald’s part there was also an element of protection towards his beautiful sister; the fact that he was so avowedly the spoilt son of his irascible stepfather enabled him many a time to stand between Monica and the colonel’s unbridled temper.

“Latterly, however, some brightness and romance had been introduced into the drab existence of Monica Glenluce by the discreet courtship of her latest admirer, Mr. Morley Thrall. Mr. Thrall was a wealthy man, not too young, and of independent position, who presumably did not care whether county society would cut him or no in consequence of his marriage with the stepdaughter of ‘Re-mount Forburg.’

“Subsequent events showed that he had observed the greatest discretion while he was courting Monica. No one knew that there was an understanding between him and the girl, least of all the colonel. Mr. Morley Thrall came, not too frequently, to Brudenell Court; while there he appeared to devote most of his attention to his host and to Gerald, and to take little if any notice of Monica. She had probably given him a hint of rocks ahead, and he had succeeded in avoiding the momentous interview with the colonel which Monica had learned to look on with dread.

“Mr. Morley Thrall had been asked to stay at Brudenell Court for Christmas, the other guests being

a Major Rawstone, with his wife and daughter Rachel. They were all at dinner on that memorable Christmas Eve when the tragedy occurred, and all the men hurried out of the dining-room in the wake of their host when first the burglary alarm was given.

“Thus did matters stand at Brudenell Court when, directly after the holidays, Jim Peyton, a groom recently in the employ of Colonel Forburg, was brought before the magistrates charged with the murder of his former master. There was a pretty stiff case against him, too. It seems that he had lately been dismissed by Colonel Forburg for drunkenness, and that before dismissing him the colonel had given him a thrashing which apparently was well deserved, because while he was drunk he very nearly set fire to the stables, and an awful disaster was only averted by the timely arrival of the colonel himself upon the scene.

“Be that as it may, the man went away swearing vengeance; subsequently he took out a summons for assault against Colonel Forburg, and only got one shilling damages. This had occurred a week before Christmas. There were several witnesses there who could swear to the threatening language used by Peyton on more than one occasion since then, and of course he had been caught in the very act of trying to break into the house through the French window of the smoking-room.

“On the other hand, the revolver with which ‘Remount Forburg’ had been shot, and which was found close to the body with two empty chambers, was identified as the colonel’s own property, one which he always

kept, loaded, in a drawer of his desk in the smoking-room. And—this is the interesting point—the shutters of the smoking-room were found by the police-inspector, who examined them subsequently, to be bolted on the inside, just as they had been left earlier in the evening by the footman whose business it was to see to the fastening of windows and shutters on the ground floor.

“This fact—the shutters being bolted on the inside—was confirmed by Miss Monica Glenluce, who had been the first to go into the smoking-room after the tragic event. Her brother joined her subsequently. Both of these witnesses said that the room looked absolutely undisturbed, the shutters were bolted, the drawer of the desk was closed; they had remained in the room until after the visit of the police-inspector.

“After the positive evidence of these two witnesses, the police prosecution had of necessity to fall back on the far-fetched theory that Colonel Forburg himself, before he hurried out in order to join in the chase against the burglar, had run into the smoking-room and picked up his revolver, and that, having overtaken Peyton, he had threatened him; that Peyton had then jumped on him, wrenched the weapon out of his hand, and shot him. It was a far-fetched theory, certainly, and one which the defense quickly upset. Gerald Glenluce, for one, was distinctly under the impression that the colonel ran from the dining-room straight out into the garden, and a young footman who was watching the fun from the front door, and saw the colonel run

out, was equally sure that he had not a revolver in his hand.

“Peyton got six months hard for attempted house-breaking; there really was no evidence against him to justify the more serious charge; but when the charge of murder was withdrawn, it left the mystery of ‘Re-mount Forburg’s’ tragic end seemingly more impenetrable than before. Nevertheless, the coroner and jury labored conscientiously at the inquest. No stone was to be left unturned to bring the murderer of ‘Re-mount Forburg’ to justice; and in this laudable effort the coroner had the able and unqualified assistance of Miss Glenluce. However bitter her feelings may have been in the past towards her stepfather while he lived, she seemed determined that his murderer should not go unpunished. Nay, more, there appeared to be in all her actions during this terrible time a strange note of vindictiveness and animosity, as if the unknown man who had rid her of an arrogant and brutal tyrant had really done her a lasting injury.

“It was entirely through her energy and exertions that certain witnesses were induced to come forward and give what turned out to be highly sensational evidence. The police, who were convinced that James Peyton was guilty, had turned all their investigations in the direction of proving their theories. Miss Monica, on the other hand, had seemingly made up her mind that the murderer was to be sought for inside the house; it even appeared as if she had certain suspicions which she only desired to confirm. To this end she had ques-

tioned and cross-questioned every one who was in the house on that fatal night, well knowing how reluctant some people are to be mixed up in any way with police proceedings. But at last she had forced two persons to speak, and it was on the first day of the inquest that at last a glimmer of light was thrown upon the mysterious tragedy.

“After the medical evidence, which went to establish beyond a doubt that Colonel Forburg died from a shot wound inflicted at close range, both balls having penetrated the heart, Miss Glenluce was called. Replying to the coroner, who had put certain questions to her with regard to the colonel’s state of mind just before the tragedy, she said that he appeared to have a premonition that something untoward was about to happen. When the butler ran into the dining-room, saying that a burglar had been seen trying to break into the house, the colonel had jumped up from the table at once.

“‘I did the same,’ Miss Monica went on, ‘as I was genuinely alarmed; but my stepfather, in his peremptory way, ordered me to sit still. “I believe,” he said to me, with a funny laugh, “that it’s a put-up job. It’s some friend of Thrall’s giving him a hand.” I could not, of course, understand what he meant by that, and I looked at Mr. Thrall for an explanation. I must add that Mr. Thrall had been extraordinarily moody all through dinner; he appeared flushed, and I noticed particularly that he never spoke either to my stepfather, to my brother, or to me. However, at the moment I failed to catch his eye, and the very next second

he was out of the room, on the heels of Colonel Forburg.'

"This was remarkable evidence, to say the least of it, but nevertheless it was confirmed by two witnesses who heard the colonel make that strange remark; one was Rachel Rawstone, the young friend who was dining at Brudenell Court that Christmas Eve, and the other was Gerald Glenluce. But there was more to come. Thanks again to Miss Monica's insistence, the footman at Brudenell Court, a lad named Cambalt, had been induced to come forward with a story which he had evidently intended to keep hidden within his bosom, if possible. He gave his evidence with obvious reluctance, and in a scarcely audible voice. It was generally noticed, however, that Miss Monica urged him frequently to speak up.

"Cambalt deposed that just before dinner on Christmas Eve, he had gone in to tidy the smoking-room before the gentlemen came down from dressing. As he opened the door he saw Mr. Morley Thrall standing in the middle of the room facing Colonel Forburg, who was seated at his desk. Young Mr. Glenluce was standing near the mantelpiece with one foot on the fender, staring into the fire. Mr. Thrall, according to witness, was livid with rage.

"'E took a step forward like,' Cambalt went on, amidst breathless silence on the part of public and jury alike, 'and 'e raised 'is fist. But the colonel 'e just laughed, then 'e opened the drawer of the desk and took out a revolver, and showed it to Mr. Thrall and says: "'Ere y'are, there's a revolver 'andy, any way.'"

Then Mr. Thrall 'e swore like anything, and says: "You blackguard, you d—— scoundrel! You ought to be shot like the cur you are!" I thought he would strike the colonel, but young Mr. Glenluce 'e just stepped quickly in between the two gentlemen, and 'e says: "Look 'ere, Thrall! I won't put up with this! You jess get out!" Then one of the gentlemen seed me, and Mr. Thrall 'e walked out of the room.'

"'And what happened after he had gone?' the coroner asked.

"'Oh,' the witness replied, "the colonel 'e threw the revolver back into the drawer, and laughed sarcastic like. Then 'e 'eld out 'is 'and to Mr. Gerald, and says: "Thanks, my boy! You did 'elp me to get rid of that ruffian." After that,' Cambalt concluded, 'I got on with my work, and the gentlemen took no notice of me.'

"This witness was very much pressed with questions as to what happened later on when the burglary alarm was given and the gentlemen all hurried out of the house. Cambalt was in the hall at the time, and he made straight for the front door to see some of the fun; he said that the colonel was out first, and the other three gentlemen, Mr. Gerald, Mr. Rawstone, and Mr. Morley Thrall, went out after him; Mr. Thrall was the last to go outside; he ran across the garden in the direction of the five-acre field. Major Rawstone remained somewhere near the house; but it was a very dark night, and he, Cambalt, soon lost sight of the gentlemen. Presently, however, Mr. Thrall came back towards the house. It was a few minutes after the

shots had been fired, and witness heard Mr. Thrall say to Major Rawstone: 'I suppose it's that fool Forburg potting away at the burglar; he'll get himself into trouble, if he doesn't look out.' Soon after that Mr. Gerald came running back with the news that the burglar had fallen into the arms of a passing constable, and Cambalt then returned to his duties in the dining-room.

"As you see," the Old Man in the Corner went on glibly, "this witness' evidence was certainly sensational. The jury, which was composed of farm laborers, with the local butcher as foreman, had by now fully made up its silly mind that Mr. Morley Thrall had taken the opportunity of sneaking into the smoking-room, snatching up the revolver, and shooting 'Re-mount Forburg,' whom he hated because the colonel was opposing his marriage with Miss Monica. It was all as clear as daylight to those dunderheads, and from that moment they simply would not listen to any more evidence. They had made up their minds; they were ready with their verdict, and it was: Manslaughter against Morley Thrall. Not murder, you see! The dolts, who had all of them suffered from 'Re-mount Forburg's' arrogance and violent temper would not admit that killing such vermin was a capital crime. The following day Mr. Morley Thrall, himself a J.P., was brought up before his brother magistrates on an ignominious charge.

"It is not often," the Old Man in the Corner resumed after a while, "that so serious a charge is preferred against a gentleman of Mr. Morley Thrall's social position, and I am afraid that the best of us are snobbish

enough to be more interested in a gentleman criminal than in an ordinary Bill Sykes.

“I happened to be present at that magisterial inquiry when Mr. Morley Thrall, J.P., was brought in between two warders, looking quite calm and self-possessed. Every one of us there noticed that when he first came in, and in fact throughout that trying inquiry, his eyes sought to meet those of Miss Glenluce, who sat at the solicitor’s table; but whenever she chanced to look his way, she quickly averted her gaze again, and turned her head away with a contemptuous shrug. Gerald Glenluce, on the other hand, made pathetic efforts at showing sympathy with the accused, but he was of such unprepossessing appearance and was so shy and awkward that it was small wonder Morley Thrall took little if any notice of him.

“Very soon we got going. I must tell you, first of all, that the whole point of the evidence rested upon a question of time. If the accused took the revolver out of the desk in the smoking-room, when did he do it? The footman, Cambalt, reiterated the statement which he had made at the inquest. He was, of course, pressed to say definitely whether, after the quarrel between Mr. Morley Thrall and the colonel which he had witnessed, and before every one went in to dinner, Mr. Thrall might have gone back to the smoking-room and extracted the revolver from the drawer of the desk; but Cambalt said positively that he did not think this was possible. He himself, after he had tidied the smoking-room, had been in and out of the hall preparing to serve dinner; the door of the smoking-room gave on the hall,

between the dining-room and the passage leading to the kitchens. If any one had gone in or out of the smoking-room at that time, Cambalt must have seen them.

“At this point Miss Glenluce was seen to lean forward and to say something in a whisper to the Clerk of the Justices, who in his turn whispered to the Chairman on the Bench, and a moment or two later that gentleman asked the witness:

“‘Are you absolutely prepared to swear that no one went in or out of the smoking-room while you were making ready to serve dinner?’

“Then, as the young man seemed to hesitate, the magistrate added more emphatically:

“‘Think, now! You were busy with your usual avocations; there would have been nothing extraordinary in one of the gentlemen going in or out of the smoking-room at that hour. Do you really believe, and are you prepared to swear, that such a very ordinary incident would have impressed itself indelibly upon your mind?’

“Thus pressed and admonished, Cambalt retrenched himself behind a vague: ‘No, sir. I shouldn’t like to swear one way or the other.’

“Whereat Miss Monica threw a defiant look at the accused, who, however, did not as much as wink an eyelid in response.

“Presently, when that lady herself was called, no one could fail to notice that she, like the coroner’s jury the previous day, had absolutely made up her mind that Morley Thrall was guilty; otherwise her attitude of open hostility towards him would have been quite inexplicable. She dwelt at full length on the fact that

Mr. Thrall had paid her marked attention for months, and that he had asked her to marry him; she had given him her consent, and between them they had decided to keep their engagement a secret until after she, Monica, had attained her twenty-first birthday, when she would be free to marry whom she chose.

“ ‘Unfortunately,’ the witness went on, suddenly assuming a dry, pursed-up manner, ‘Colonel Forburg got wind of this; he was always very much set against my marrying at all, and between tea and dinner on Christmas Eve he and I had some very sharp words together on the subject, at the end of which my stepfather said very determinedly: “Christmas or no Christmas, the fellow shall leave my house by the first available train to-morrow, and to-night I am going to give him a piece of my mind.” ’

“Just for a moment after Miss Glenluce had finished speaking the accused seemed to depart from his attitude of dignity and reserve, and an indignant ‘Oh!’ quickly repressed, escaped his lips. The public by this time was dead against him; they are just like sheep, as you know, and the verdict of the coroner’s jury had prejudiced them from the start, and the police, aided by Miss Glenluce, had certainly built up a formidable case against the unfortunate man.

“I should be talking until to-morrow morning were I to give you in detail all the evidence that was adduced in support of the prosecution. The accused listened to it all with perfect calm; he stood with arms folded, his eyes fixed on nothing. The ‘Oh!’ of indignation did not again cross his lips, nor did he look once at Miss

Monica Glenluce. I can assure you that at one moment that day things were looking very black against him.

“Fortunately for him, however, he had a very clever lawyer to defend him in the person of his distinguished cousin, Sir Evelyn Thrall. The latter, by amazingly clever cross-examination of the servants and guests at Brudenell Court, had succeeded in establishing the fact that at no time, from the moment that the burglary alarm was given until after the two revolver shots had been heard, was the accused completely out of sight of some one or other of the witnesses. He was the last to leave the dining-room; Mrs. Rawstone and her daughter testified to that. He had stayed behind one moment after the other three gentlemen had gone out in order to say a few words to Monica Glenluce. Miss Rawstone was standing inside the dining-room door, and she was quite positive that Mr. Thrall went straight out into the garden.

“On the other hand, Major Rawstone saw him in the forecourt coming away from the five-acre meadow only a very few moments after the shots were fired, and gave it absolutely as his opinion that it would have been impossible for the accused to have fired those shots. This is where the question of time came in.

“‘When a man who bears a spotless reputation,’ Major Rawstone argued, ‘finds that he has killed a fellow creature, he would necessarily pause a moment, horror-struck with what he has done; whether the deed was premeditated or involuntary, he would at least try and ascertain if life was really extinct. It is inconceiv-

able that any man save an habitual and therefore callous criminal, would just throw down his weapon and with absolute calm, hands in pockets, and without a tremor in his voice, make a casual remark to a friend. Now, I saw Mr. Morley Thrall perhaps two minutes after the shots were fired; in that time he could not have walked from the center of the field to the forecourt where I was standing; and he had not been running, as his voice was absolutely clear, and he came walking towards me with his hands in his pockets.'

"As was only to be expected, Sir Evelyn Thrall made the most of Major Rawstone's evidence. With equal skill, too, Sir Evelyn brought forward evidence to bear out the statement made by the accused on the matter of his quarrel with Colonel Forburg.

"'Just before dinner,' Mr. Thrall stated, 'Colonel Forburg told me he had something to say to me in private. I followed him into the smoking-room, and there he gave me certain information with regard to his past life, and also with regard to Miss Glenluce's parentage, which made it absolutely impossible for me, in spite of the deep regard which I have for that lady, to offer her marriage. Miss Glenluce is the innocent victim of tragic circumstances in the past, and Forburg was just an unmitigated blackguard, and I told him so; but I had my family to consider, and very reluctantly I came to the conclusion that I could not introduce any relation of Colonel Forburg into its circle. Colonel Forburg did not stand in the way of my marrying his stepdaughter; it was I who most reluctantly withdrew.'

"Whilst the accused was cross-examined upon this

statement—and he gave his answers in firm, dignified tones—Miss Monica never took her eyes off him, and surely, if looks could kill, Mr. Morley Thrall would not at that moment have escaped with his life, so full of deadly hatred and contempt was her gaze. The accused had signed a much fuller statement than the one which he made in open court; it contained a detailed account of his interview with Colonel Forburg, and of the circumstances which finally induced him to give up all thoughts of asking Miss Glenluce to be his wife.

“These facts were not made public at the time for the sake of Miss Monica and of the unfortunate Gerald, but it seems that the transactions which had earned for the Colonel the ‘sobriquet of ‘Re-mount Forburg’ were so disreputable and so dishonest that not only was he cashiered from the Army, but he served a term of imprisonment for treason, fraud, and embezzlement. He had no right to be styled colonel any longer, and quite recently had been threatened with prosecution if he persisted in making further use of his Army rank.

“But this was not all the trouble. It seems that in his career of improbity he had been associated with a man named Nosdel, a man of Dutch extraction whom he had known in South Africa. This man was subsequently hanged for a particularly brutal murder, and it was his widow who was ‘Re-mount Forburg’s’ second wife, and the mother of Monica and of Gerald, who had been given the fancy name of Glenluce.

“Obviously a man in Mr. Morley Thrall’s position could not marry into such a family, and it appears that whenever there was a question of a suitor for Monica,

'Re-mount Forburg' would tell the aspirant the whole story of his own shady past, and above all that of Monica's father. Sir Evelyn Thrall had been clever enough to discover one or two gentlemen who had had the same experience as his cousin Morley; they, too, just before their courtship came to a head, had had a momentous interview with 'Re-mount Forburg,' who found this means of choking off any further desire for matrimony on the part of a man who had family connections to consider. But it was very obvious that Mr. Morley Thrall had no motive for killing 'Re-mount Forburg'; he would have left Brudenell Court that very evening, he said, only that young Glenluce had begged him, for Monica's sake, not to make a scene; anyway, he was leaving the house the next day, and had no intention of ever darkening its door again.

"Poor Monica Glenluce or Nosdel, ignorant of the hideous cloud that hung over her entire life, ignorant, too, of what had passed between her stepfather and Mr. Morley Thrall, felt nothing but hatred and contempt for the man whose love, she believed, had proved as unstable as that of any of her other admirers. Presumably he found means to make her understand that all was irrevocably at an end between them as far as he was concerned, whereupon her regard for him turned to bitterness and desire for revenge.

"And, indeed, but for the cleverness of a distinguished lawyer, poor Morley Thrall might have found himself the victim of a judicial error brought about by the deliberate enmity of a woman. Had he been committed for trial, she would have had more time at her disposal

to manufacture evidence against him, which I am convinced she had a mind to do."

"As it is," I now put in tentatively, for the Old Man in the Corner had been silent for some little while, "the withdrawal of the charge of murder against Morley Thrall did not help to clear up the mystery of 'Re-mount Forburg's tragic death."

"Not so far as the public is concerned," he retorted dryly.

"You have a theory?" I asked.

"Not a theory," he replied. "I know who killed 'Re-mount Forburg.'"

"How do you know?" I riposted.

"By logic and inference," he said. "As it was proved that Morley Thrall did not kill him, and that Miss Monica could not have done it, as the ladies did not join in the chase after the burglar, I looked about me for the only other person in whose interest it was to put that blackguard out of the way."

"You mean—"

"I mean the boy Gerald, of course. Openly and before the other witness, Cambalt, he stood up for his stepfather against Thrall, who was not measuring his words; but just think how the knowledge which he had gained about his own parentage and that of his sister must have rankled in his mind. He must have come to the conclusion that while this man—his stepfather—lived, there would be no chance for him to make friends, no chance for the sister whom he loved ever to have a home, a life of her own. Whether that interview on Christmas Eve was the first inkling which he had of the

real past history of his own and Forburg's family, it is impossible to say. Probably he had suspicions of it before, when, one by one, Monica's suitors fell away after certain private interviews with the colonel. Morley Thrall must have been a last hope, and that, too, was dashed to the ground by the same infamous means.

"I am not prepared to say that the boy got hold of the revolver that night with the deliberate intention of killing his stepfather at the earliest opportunity; he may have run into the smoking-room to snatch up the weapon, only with a view to using it against the burglar; certain it is that he overtook 'Re-mount Forburg' in the five-acre field, and that he shot him then and there. Remember that the night was very dark, and that there was a great deal of confusion. The boy was nimble enough, after he had thrown down the revolver, to run across the field, and then to go back to the house by a roundabout way."

"But," I objected, "how could young Glenluce run into the smoking-room, pick the revolver out of a drawer, and run back through the hall, with servants and guests standing about? Some one would be sure to see him."

"No one saw him," the funny creature retorted, "for he did it at the moment of the greatest confusion. The butler had run in with the news of the burglary, the colonel jumped up and ran out through the hall, the guests had not yet made up their minds what to do. In moments like this there are always just a few seconds of pandemonium quite sufficient for a boy like Gerald to make a dash for the smoking-room."

"But after that—"

"He took the revolver out of the drawer and ran out through the French window."

"But the shutters were found to be bolted on the inside," I argued, "when they were examined by the police."

"So they were," he admitted. "Miss Monica had already been in there with young Gerald. They had seen to the shutters."

"Then you think that Monica knew?"

"Of course she did."

"Then her desire to prove Morley Thrall guilty—"

"Was partly hatred of him, and partly the desire to shield her brother," the Old Man in the Corner concluded, as he collected his bit of string, and his huge umbrella. "Think it over; you will see that I am right. I am sorry for those two—aren't you? But they are selling Brudenell Court, I understand, and their mother's fortune has become theirs absolutely. They will go abroad together, make a home for themselves, and one day perhaps everything will be forgotten, and a new era of happiness will arise for the innocent, now that the guilty has been so signally punished. But it was an interesting case. Don't you agree with me?"

THE TYTHERTON CASE

“**W**HAT do you make of this?” the Old Man in the Corner said to me that afternoon. “A curious case, is it not?”

And with his claw-like fingers he indicated the paragraph in the “Evening Post” which I had just been perusing with great interest.

“At best,” I replied, “it is a very unpleasant business for the Carysforts.”

“And at worst?” he retorted with a chuckle.

“Well—” I remarked, dryly.

“Do you think they are guilty?” he asked.

“I don’t see who else—”

“Ah!” he broke in, with his usual lack of manners, “that is such a stale argument. One doesn’t see who else, therefore, one makes up one’s mind that so-and-so must be guilty. I’ll lay an even bet with any one that out of a dozen cases of miscarriage of justice, I could point to ten that were directly due to that fallacious reasoning.

“Now, take as an example the Tytherton case, in which you are apparently interested. It was an unprecedented outrage which stirred the busy provincial town to its depths, the victim, Mr. Walter Stonebridge, being one of its most noted solicitors. He had his office in Tytherton High Street, and lived in a small, detached

house on the Great West Road. The house stood in the middle of a small garden, and had only one story about the ground floor. Mr. Walter Stonebridge was a bachelor, and his domestic staff consisted of a married couple—Henning by name—who did all that was necessary for him in the house.

“It was on the last evening of February. The Hennings had gone upstairs to their room as usual at ten o’clock. Mr. Stonebridge was at the time sitting in his study on the ground floor. He was in the habit of sitting up late, reading and writing. On this occasion, he told the Hennings to close the shutters and lock the back door as usual, but to leave the front door on the latch as he was expecting a visitor. The Hennings thought nothing of that, as one or two gentlemen—friends, or sometimes clients of Mr. Stonebridge—would now and then drop in late to see him. Anyway, they went contentedly to bed.

“A little while later—they could not exactly recollect at what hour, because they had already settled down for the night—they heard the front-door bell, and immediately afterwards Mr. Stonebridge’s footsteps along the hall. Then suddenly they heard a crash, followed by what sounded like a struggle, then a smothered cry, and finally silence. Henning was out of bed, and on the landing with a candle, in an instant, when he heard Mr. Stonebridge’s voice calling up to him from below:

“‘It’s all right, Henning. I caught my foot in this confounded rug. That’s all.’

“Henning looked over the banister, holding the candle high, and seeing nothing, he shouted down:

“ ‘Shall I give you a ‘and, sir?’

“But Mr. Stonebridge at once replied, quite cheerily:

“ ‘No, no! I’m all right. You go back to bed.’”

“And Henning did as he was told. Nor did he or his wife hear anything more during the night. But in the early morning when Mrs. Henning came downstairs, she was horrorstruck to find Mr. Stonebridge in the dining-room, lying across the table, to which he was securely pinioned with a rope; a serviette taken out of the sideboard drawer had been tied tightly around his mouth, and his eyes were blindfolded with his own pocket handkerchief.

“The woman’s screams brought her husband upon the scene. Together they set to work to rescue their master from his horrible plight. At first they thought that he was dead, and Henning was for fetching the police immediately; but his wife declared that Mr. Stonebridge was just unconscious, and she started to apply certain household restoratives and made Henning force some brandy through Mr. Stonebridge’s lips.

“Presently, the poor man opened his eyes, and gave one or two other signs of returning consciousness, but he was still very queer and shaky. The Hennings then carried him upstairs, undressed him and put him to bed; and then Henning ran for the doctor.

“Well! It was days, or, in fact, weeks before Mr. Stonebridge had sufficiently recovered to give a coherent statement of what happened to him on that fateful night, and—which was just as much to the point—what had happened the previous day. The doctor had prescribed complete rest in the interim. The patient

had suffered from concussion and I know not what; and those events had got so mixed up in his brain, that to try and disentangle them was such an effort, that every time he attempted it, it nearly sent him into a brain fever. But in the meanwhile, his friends had been busy—notably, Mr. Stonebridge's head clerk, Mr. Medburn, who was giving the police no rest. There was, even without the evidence of the principal witness concerned, plenty of facts to go on, to make out a case against the perpetrator of such a dastardly outrage.

“That robbery had been the main motive of the assault, was easily enough established. A small fire and burglar-proof safe, which stood in a corner of the morning-room, had been opened and ransacked. When examined, it was found to contain only a few trinkets, which had probably a sentimental value, but were otherwise worthless. The key of the safe—one of a bunch—was still in the lock, which went to prove, either that Mr. Stonebridge had the safe open when he was attacked, or what was more likely, considering the solicitor's well-known careful habits, that the assailant had ransacked his victim's pockets after he had knocked him down. A pocket-book, torn, and containing only a few unimportant papers, lay on the ground. There had been a fire in the room at the time of the outrage, and careful analysis of the ashes found in the hearth, revealed the presence of a quantity of burnt paper.

“But robbery being established as the motive of the outrage did not greatly help matters, because, while Mr. Stonebridge remained in such a helpless condition, it was impossible to ascertain what booty his assailant

had carried away. Soon, however, the first ray of light was thrown upon what had seemed until this hour an impenetrable mystery.

“It appears that Mr. Medburn was looking after the business in High Street during his employer’s absence; and one morning—it was on the Monday following the night of the outrage—he had a visit from a client, who sent in his name as Felix Shap. The head clerk knew something about this client, who had recently come over to England from somewhere abroad, in order to make good his claim to certain royalties on what is known as the Shap Fuelettes—a kind of cheap fuel which was launched some time before the War by Sir Alfred Carysfort, Bart., of Tytherton Grange, and out of which that gentleman made an immense fortune, and, incidentally got his title thereby.

“This man, Shap—a Dutchman by birth—was, it appears, the original inventor and patentee of these fuelettes, and Mr. Carysfort, as he was then, had met him out in the Dutch East Indies, and had bought the invention from him for a certain sum down, and then exploited it in England first, and afterwards all over the world at immense profit. Sir Alfred Carysfort died about a year ago, leaving a fortune of over a million sterling, and was succeeded in the title and in the managing-directorship of the business by his eldest son, David, a married man with a large family. The business had long since been turned into a private limited liability company, the bulk of the shares being held by the managing-director.

“The fact that the patent rights in the Shap Fuelettes

had been sold by the inventor to the late Alfred Carysfort had never been in dispute. It further appeared that Felix Shap had at one time been a very promising mining engineer, but that in consequence of incurable, intemperate habits he had gradually drifted down the social scale. He lost one good appointment after another, until finally, he was just an underpaid clerk in the office of an engineer in Batavia, whose representative in England was Mr. Alfred Carysfort. The latter was on a visit to the head office in Batavia some twelve years ago, when he met Shap, who was then on his beam-ends. He had recently been sacked by his employers for intemperance, and was on the fair way to becoming one of those hopeless human derelicts, who usually end their days either on the gallows or in a convict prison.

“But at the back of Shap’s fuddled mind there had lingered throughout his downward career the remembrance of a certain invention which he had once patented, and which he had always declared would one day bring him an immense fortune. But though he had spent quite a good deal of money in keeping up his patent rights, he had never had the pluck and perseverance to exploit or even to perfect his invention.

“Alfred Carysfort on the other hand, was brilliantly clever, he was ambitious, probably none too scrupulous, and at once he saw the immense possibilities, if properly worked, of Shap’s rough invention, and he set to work to obtain the man’s confidence, and, presumably, by exercising certain persuasion and pressure he got the wastrel to make over to him, in exchange for a few

hundred pounds, the entire patent rights in the Fuellettes.

“The transaction was, as far as that goes, perfectly straightforward and above board; it was embodied in a contract drawn up by an English solicitor, who was the British Consul in Batavia at the time; nor was it—taking everything into consideration—an unfair one. Shap would never have done anything with his invention, and a clean, wholesome and entirely practical fuel would probably have been thus lost to the world. But there remains the fact that Alfred Carysfort died a dozen years later worth more than a million sterling, every penny of which he had made out of an invention for which he had originally paid less than five hundred.

“Mr. Medburn had been put in possession of these facts some few weeks previously, when Mr. Felix Shap had first presented himself at the private house of Mr. Stonebridge. He came armed with a letter of introduction from a relative of Mr. Stonebridge’s, whom he had met out in Java, and he was accompanied by a friend—an American named Julian Lloyd—who was piloting him about the place, and acting as his interpreter and secretary, as he himself had never been in England and spoke English very indifferently. His passport and papers of identification were perfectly in order. He appeared before Mr. Stonebridge as a man still on the right side of sixty, who certainly bore traces on his prematurely wrinkled face and in his tired, lusterless eyes of a life spent in dissipation rather than in work, but otherwise, he bore himself well, was well-dressed and appeared plentifully supplied with money.

“The story that he told Mr. Stonebridge through the intermediary of his friend, Julian Lloyd, was a very curious one. According to his version of various transactions which took place between himself and the late Sir Alfred Carysfort, the latter had, some time after the signing of the original contract, made him a definite promise *in writing*, that should the proceeds in the business of the Shap Fuelettes exceed £10,000 in any one year, he, Sir Alfred, would pay the original inventor, out of his own pocket, a sum equivalent to twenty per cent. of all such profits over and above the £10,000, with a minimum of £200.

“Mr. Shap had brought over with him all the correspondence relating to this promise, and, moreover, he adduced as proof positive that Sir Alfred had looked on that promise as binding, and had at first loyally abided by it, the fact that until 1916 he had paid to Mr. Felix Shap the sum of £200 every year. These sums had been paid half-yearly through Sir Alfred’s bankers, and acknowledgments were duly sent by Shap direct to the bank. All of which could, of course, be easily verified. But in the year 1916 these payments suddenly ceased. Mr. Shap wrote repeatedly to Sir Alfred, but never received any reply. At first he thought that there were certain difficulties in the way owing to the European War, so, after a while, he ceased writing. But presently there came the Armistice. Mr. Shap wrote again and again, but was again met by the same obstinate silence.

“In the meanwhile he had come to the end of his resources. He had spent all that he had ever saved; but,

nevertheless, he was determined that as soon as he could scrape up a sufficiency of money he would go to England in order to establish his rights. Then, in 1922, he heard of Sir Alfred Carysfort's death. It was now or never if he did not mean to acquiesce silently in the terrible wrong which was being put upon him. Fortunately, he had a good friend in Mr. Julian Lloyd, who had helped him with money and advice, and at last he had arrived in England.

"Mr. Stonebridge, after he had seen the late Sir Alfred's bankers about the payments to Shap, and consulted an expert on the subject of the all-important letter signed by Alfred Carysfort, sought an interview with Sir David. From the first there seemed to be an extraordinary amount of acrimony brought into the dispute by both sides. This was understandable enough on the part of Felix Shap who felt he was being defrauded of his just dues by men who were literally coining money out of the product of his brain. But the greatest bitterness really appeared to come from the other side.

"At first Sir David Carysfort refused even to discuss the question, and denied all knowledge as to the reason or object of the payments, but after a while he must have realized that public opinion was beginning to raise its voice on the subject, and that it was not exactly singing the praises of Sir David Carysfort, Bart.

"Although Mr. Stonebridge had, of course, been discretion itself, Mr. Shap had admittedly not the same incentive to silence, and what's more, his friend, Mr.

Lloyd, made it his business to get as much publicity for the whole affair as he could. Paragraphs in the local papers had begun to appear with unabated regularity, and though there were no actual comments on the case as a whole, no prejudging of respective merits, there were unmistakable hints that it would be in Sir David's interest to put dignity on one side and come out frankly into the open with explanations and suggestions. Soon the London papers got hold of the story, and you know what that means. The Radical press simply battened on a story which placed a poor, down-at-heel inventor in the light of a victim to the insatiable greed and frank dishonesty of a high-born profiteer.

“Whether it was pressure from outside, or from his own family that suddenly induced Sir David to ‘come out into the open,’ is not generally known, certain it is that presently he condescended to give an explanation of the mysterious half-yearly payments made by his father to Felix Shap, and the explanation was so romantic, and frankly so far-fetched, that most people—especially men—refused to accept it. Notably Mr. Stonebridge—it was not the business of a lawyer to listen to sentimental stories, least of all was it the business of the lawyer acting on the other side.

“The story told by Sir David Carysfort was this:

“The late Sir Alfred, when quite a young man, had gone out as clerk to that same engineering firm in Batavia, whom he represented later on. It was then that he first met Felix Shap, who had not yet begun to go downhill. An intimacy sprang up between Alfred

Carysfort and Shap's sister, Berta, and the two were secretly married in Batavia. A year later Berta had a son, whose birth she only survived by a few hours. The marriage had been an unhappy one from the first, and Carysfort was only too thankful when his firm called him back to England, and he was able to shake off the dust of Batavia from his feet, as he hoped, for ever. He never spoke of his marriage, nor did he ever recognize or have anything to do with his son. By some pecuniary arrangement entered into with Felix Shap, the latter undertook to provide for and look after the boy, to give him his own name, and never to trouble his brother-in-law about him again. A deed-poll was, Sir David believed, duly executed, and the boy assumed the name of Alfred Shap.

“Some years later, there occurred the transaction over the Shap Fuelettes. Alfred Carysfort had come to Batavia on business. He had met Felix Shap again, who by this time had become a hopeless wastrel. The contract for the sale of the patent rights in the Fuelettes was duly executed, but whether after seeing his son once more, the call of the blood became more insistent in the heart of Alfred Carysfort, or whether he merely yielded to blackmail, Sir David could not say; certain, it is, that after a while when the profits of the Shap Fuelettes Company became substantial, Sir Alfred took to sending over a couple of hundred pounds every year to Shap for the benefit of young Alfred. Then the War broke out. Young Alfred joined the Australian Expeditionary Force, and was killed in Gallipoli in August, 1915. As soon as Sir Alfred had definite news of the

boy's death, he naturally stopped all further payments to Shap.

"The story, as you see, sounded plausible enough; and if it proved to be untrue, it would reflect great credit on Sir David's gift of imagination. Felix Shap, as was only to be expected, denied it from beginning to end. The whole thing, he declared, was an impudent falsehood, based on a semblance of truth. It was quite true that he had adopted and for years had cared for his sister's son, who was subsequently killed in Gallipoli. It was also true that Alfred Carysfort had years ago paid some attention to his sister Berta, but there never was any question of marriage between them; young Carysfort deeming himself far too grand and well-born to marry the daughter of an obscure East Indian trader. Berta had subsequently married a man of mixed blood, who deserted her, and went off somewhere to Argentina or Honduras, Shap did not know where; at any rate, he was never heard of again.

"In proof of his version of the romantic story, Felix Shap actually had a copy of his sister's marriage certificate, as well as one or two letters, written at different times to his sister Berta by her rascally husband. He had, indeed, plenty of proofs for his assertions. But when Mr. Stonebridge asked for confirmation of Sir David's story, the latter appeared either unprepared or unwilling to produce any. Whereupon, Mr. Stonebridge, on behalf of his client, entered an action for the recovery of certain royalties due to him on the sales of the Shap Fuelettes, the amount to be presently agreed on after examination of the audited accounts.

"Thus matters stood when on that Wednesday night in February last, Mr. Stonebridge was found gagged and unconscious, the victim of a murderous and inexplicable assault.

"On the Saturday following, Mr. Felix Shap, accompanied by his friend, Mr. Lloyd, called on Mr. Medburn at the office in High Street. They had read in the papers certain details which had filled Shap with apprehension. He had read that the safe in the morning-room in Mr. Stonebridge's house had been obviously ransacked, and that the analysis of the ashes in the grate had revealed the presence of a large quantity of burnt paper.

"'My friend, Mr. Shap, would like you to put his mind at rest, Mr.—er—Medburn,' Mr. Lloyd said, in an anxious, agitated tone of voice, 'that the papers relating to his case, which he entrusted to Mr. Stonebridge, are safely locked up in a safe at this office.'

"Unfortunately, the head clerk was not able to satisfy Mr. Shap on that point. Mr. Stonebridge had never brought the papers to the office, nor had Mr. Medburn ever seen them. His impression was—he regretted to say—that Mr. Stonebridge had, for the time being, kept all papers relating to this particular case at his private house; just as he had always seen Mr. Shap there rather than at the office. Of course, Mr. Medburn hastened to assure his visitor that Mr. Stonebridge may have kept the documents in some other secure place. Mr. Medburn couldn't say, not having access to all his employer's papers, but, in any case, he would make a comprehensive search for the missing docu-

ments, and if nothing was found, he would at once inform the police.

"An evening or two later the papers came out with flaring headlines: 'Amazing Developments in the Tytherton Outrage. Missing Documents. Sensational Turn in the Shap Fuelettes Case.' And so on. The head clerk had made an exhaustive search amongst his employer's papers, but not a trace could he find of any documents relative to Mr. Shap's case. One and all had disappeared. The original letter from Alfred Carysfort promising to pay an extra twenty per cent. on the profits of the Shap Fuelette Company under certain conditions, the letters from the scoundrel who had been Berta's husband, together with the copy of Berta's marriage certificate, everything was gone—every proof of the truth of the story which Felix Shap had come all this way to tell.

"The next exciting incident," the Old Man in the Corner continued, glibly, "in this remarkably mysterious case, was the news that Mr. Allan Carysfort, eldest son of Sir David Carysfort, Bart., had been detained in connection with the assault upon Mr. Stonebridge and the disappearance of certain papers, the property of Mr. Felix Shap of Batavia.

"Young Allan Carysfort, who was a subaltern in a cavalry regiment, had come home from India recently, and as a matter of fact, he had arrived at the Grange, the family seat just outside Tytherton, the very evening of the outrage. Acting upon certain information received, the police had detained him; he was to be brought before the magistrates on the following day;

and, in the meanwhile, it was generally understood that some highly sensational evidence had been collected by the police.

“Need I say, that the following day, when the young man was brought before the magistrates, the court was crowded. Sir David was a magistrate, too, but, of course, he did not sit that day. To see his eldest son arraigned before his brother beaks must have been a bitter pill for his pride to swallow.

“We had the usual formal evidence of arrest, the medical evidence, and so on; after which we quickly plunged into exciting business. Mr. Stonebridge, we were soon told, had made a statement. He was not yet strong enough to appear in person, *but he had made a statement*; so, at last, the public was to be initiated into the mysteries that surrounded the inexplicable assault.

“‘After my servants had gone to bed,’ Mr. Stonebridge had stated, ‘I sat awhile reading in my study. I was expecting a visit from Mr. Shap, as we had more or less arranged a quiet chat at my house that evening on the subject of his affairs. He and Mr. Lloyd, who were both of them very fond of the cinema, were in the habit of dropping in after the show, on their way home. At about a quarter to eleven—I am sure it was not later—there was a ring at the front-door bell, and I went to open the door. No sooner had I done this, than a shawl, or muffler of some sort, was thrown over my face, and I was made to lose my balance by the thrust of a foot between my two shins. I came down backwards with a crash.

“The whole thing occurred in fewer seconds than it takes to describe; the next moment, I had the sensation of cold steel against my temple, I heard an ominous click, and a husky voice whispered in my ear: “Your servant is coming out of his room. Speak to him, tell him you are all right, or I shoot.” What could I do? I was utterly helpless, and a revolver was held to my temple. The muffler was then lifted from my mouth, I could feel the man bending over me, I could feel his hot breath on my forehead, and a few seconds later I heard Henning come out of his room upstairs on the landing. “If he comes downstairs,” the voice whispered close to my ear, “I shoot.”

“Then it was,’ Mr. Stonebridge went on to say, ‘that I shouted up to Henning that I had only tripped over a rug, and that I was quite all right. I don’t think I ever looked death so very near in the face before. The next moment I heard Henning go back to his room. After that I remember nothing more. I only have a vague recollection of a sudden terrible pain in my head; everything else is a blank until I found myself in bed, and with vague stirrings of memory bringing a return of that same appalling headache.’

“The great point about Mr. Stonebridge’s evidence was that he was utterly unable to identify his assailant. He was not even sure whether he had been attacked by two men or one, since he had been blindfolded at the outset, and all that he heard was a husky voice that spoke in a whisper. He was ready to admit that he might have left the safe unlocked when he went to answer the front-door bell, and he certainly had the pa-

pers relating to Mr. Shap's case on his desk, as he had been going through them earlier in the evening. Those papers, therefore, had undoubtedly been burned in the grate, and it was obvious that the theft and destruction of those papers was the motive of the assault.

“After that we went from excitement to excitement. We did not get it all the same day, of course. Allan Carysfort appeared, as far as I can remember, three or four times before the local magistrates. In between times he was out on bail, this having been fixed at £1,000 in two recognizances £500 each, with an additional £500 on his own. It seems that when he was arrested he had made a statement, to which he had since then unreservedly subscribed. He said that he had arrived in London from Southampton on Monday the twenty-sixth, and after seeing to some business in town, he took the eighteen P.M. train on the twenty-eighth to Tytherton, where he arrived at nine-fifty, having dined on board. His father met him at the station with the car, but it was such a beautiful moonlit night, Sir David and himself decided that they would walk to the Grange, and then sent the car home with a message to Lady Carysfort that they would be home at about eleven o'clock.

“Carysfort had been asked whether it was not strange that after being absent from home for so long, he should have elected to put off seeing his mother till a much later hour.

“‘Not at all,’ he replied. ‘My father wished to put me *au fait* with certain family matters before I actually

saw Lady Carysfort. These matters,' he added, emphatically, in reply to questions put to him by the magistrate, 'had nothing whatever to do with financial business, least of all, were they in any relation to Mr. Shap and his affairs. My father and I,' he went on, calmly, 'walked about for a while, and then my father remembered that he wished to see a friend at the County Club. He went in there, but I preferred to take another turn out of doors, as I had not had a taste of English country air for nearly two years.

"Asked how long he had walked about Tytherton waiting for Sir David, Carysfort thought about half an hour; and when questioned as to the direction he had taken, he said he really couldn't remember.

"The police, of course, produced certain witnesses, whose testimony would justify the course they had taken in arresting a gentleman in the position of Mr. Allan Carysfort. There was, first of all, Felix Shap himself and his friend Julian Lloyd; they deposed that at about half-past ten, or perhaps a little earlier, they were on their way to see Mr. Stonebridge, as the latter had expressed a wish to see them both and have another quiet talk over a cigar and a glass of wine. Shap and Lloyd had been to the P.P.P. cinema in High Street; and they left just before the end to go to Mr. Stonebridge's house. They were within fifty yards of it, when they saw a man turn out of the nearest side street, and go up to Mr. Stonebridge's house. The man went through the garden gate and up to the front door; Shap and Lloyd saw him in the act of ringing the bell. It was then somewhere between ten-thirty and ten-

forty-five. Mr. Stonebridge was so very much in the habit of seeing friends, and even those clients with whom he was intimate, late in the evenings, that Mr. Shap and Mr. Lloyd didn't think anything of the incident; but, at the same time, they made up their minds to postpone their own visit to Mr. Stonebridge until they could be quite sure of seeing him alone. So they turned then and there, and went straight back to the Black Swan where they lodged.

"I may add that, with commendable reserve, both these witnesses refused to identify Allan Carysfort with Mr. Stonebridge's visitor on that memorable Wednesday evening. The man they saw had no overcoat and wore a bowler hat. More they could not say, as they had not seen his face clearly.

"On the other hand, the hall-porter at the County Club, another witness for the Treasury, had no cause for such reserve. He said that on the evening of February twenty-eighth, Sir David Carysfort came to the Club a little before half-past ten. Mr. Allan was with him then, but he didn't come in. The hall-porter heard him say to Sir David: 'Very well, then! I'll pick you up here in about half an hour!' And Sir David rejoined: 'Yes! Don't be late!' Mr. Allan did return to the Club at about eleven o'clock, and the two gentlemen then went off together. The hall-porter remembered the incident on that date quite distinctly, because he recollects being much surprised at seeing Mr. Allan Carysfort, whom he thought was still abroad.

"After that there was another remand. Allan Carysfort's solicitor having asked and obtained an adjourn-

ment for a week. But, by this time, as you may imagine, not only the county, but London Society, too, were absolutely horror-struck. To think that a man in the position of the Carysforts should have stooped to such an act, not only of violence but of improbity, was indeed staggering. Nor did public opinion swerve from this attitude one hair's breadth, even though at the next hearing, all the proofs which the police had adduced against the accused were absolutely confuted.

“Fortunately, for Carysfort, his solicitors had been successful in finding two witnesses, Miriam Page and Arthur Ormeley, who had seen Mr. Allan Carysfort, whom they knew by sight, strolling by the river at a quarter to eleven. They—like the hall-porter of the County Club—remembered the circumstance very clearly, because they did not know that Mr. Allan was home from abroad, and were astonished to see him there.

“The point of the evidence of these witnesses was that the river where they had seen Allan Carysfort strolling at a quarter to eleven is at the diametrically opposite end of the town to that where lies the Great West Road. Now the hall-porter had seen Allan Carysfort outside the County Club at half-past ten and again at eleven. If Carysfort was strolling by the river at a quarter to eleven, and there was no reason to impugn the credibility of the witnesses, he could not possibly have been the man whom Mr. Shap and Mr. Lloyd saw ringing the bell of Mr. Stonebridge's house at about that same hour.

“Allan Carysfort was discharged by the magistrates,

as you know. There was no definite proof against him. But public opinion is ever an uncertain quantity, and it is still dead against the Carysforts. In the public mind, two facts have remained indelibly fixed; first, that the Carysforts had everything to gain by the destruction of Felix Shap's papers; and secondly, that there was nobody else who could possibly have benefited by it.

"Since then, also, Mr. Stonebridge has made a declaration that nothing was stolen out of his safe and pocket-book except the papers and letters belonging to Felix Shap. So, what would you? Although Allan Carysfort was discharged, he did not leave the court without a stain on his character. The stain was there, and there it is to this day. It will take the Carysforts years to live the scandal down. Though some friends have remained loyal, there are always the enemies, the envious, the uncharitable, and they insist that the two witnesses—the only two, mind you, whose evidence did clear Allan Carysfort of suspicion—had been bought, and should not be believed."

He gave a dry cackle, and contemplated me through his huge horn-rimmed spectacles.

"And you are of that opinion, too, I imagine," he said.

"Well," I rejoined, "I don't see who else had any interest in doing away with those documents."

"I'll tell you," he rejoined, dryly. "Felix Shap himself."

"What *do* you mean?" I queried, with as much lofty scorn as I could command.

"I mean," he replied, "that all Felix Shap's documents were forgeries."

"Forgeries?" I exclaimed.

"Yes! Spurious! False affidavits! Forgeries, the lot of 'em. My belief is, that Stonebridge began to suspect this himself, and I think he has had a narrow escape of being murdered outright by those two rascals. As it is, they have destroyed every proof of their villainy; and old Stonebridge, I imagine, is content to let things remain as they are rather than admit publicly that he was completely taken in by two very plausible rogues."

"But," I urged, "what about the handwriting expert?"

The funny creature laughed aloud.

"Yes!" he said. "What about the expert? If there had been two they would have disagreed. And, mind you, at a distance of twelve years, a signature would be difficult of absolute identification. Every one's handwriting undergoes certain modifications in the course of years. Experts," he reiterated. "Bah!"

"But," I went on, impatiently, "I don't see the object of the whole scheme."

"The object was blackmail," the whimsical creature retorted, "and it has succeeded admirably. Already, we read that Messrs. Shap and Lloyd are staying at expensive hotels in London, that they have granted interviews to pressmen, and written articles for half-penny newspapers. We shall hear of them as cinema stars presently. They have had the most gorgeous, the most paying publicity; and presently Sir David Carys-

fort will have had enough of them, and will put a few more hundreds in their pockets just to be rid of them. That was the object of the whole scheme, my dear young lady!

“Of course, the fuddle-headed Dutchman never thought of it. I imagine that the whole scheme originated in the fertile brain of Mr. Julian Lloyd. And it was thoroughly well thought out from the manufacture of the documents and letters down to the assault on the silly old country attorney. And, mind you, the rascals originally went to a silly country attorney; they would have been afraid to go to a London lawyer, lest he be too sharp for them.

“The only mistake they made were the letters purported to be written to Berta Shap by the husband who is supposed to have disappeared, and the copy of Berta’s marriage certificate. It is those letters that gave me the clew to the whole thing. Old Stonebridge was too dull to have seen through those letters. If they were genuine why should Felix Shap have brought them over to England? They had nothing whatever to do with any contract about the Shap Fuelettes. If they were genuine, how could he guess that he would have to disprove a story of a secret marriage, and of young Alfred being the son of Sir Alfred Carysfort? By wanting to prove too much, he, to my mind, gave himself away; and one can but marvel that neither lawyers nor police saw through the roguery.

“Of course, the moment one understands that one set of papers was spurious, it is easily concluded that all the others were forgeries. And the late Sir Alfred

Carysfort, anxious only to obliterate every vestige of that early marriage of his, unwittingly played into the hands of those two scoundrels by destroying all the correspondence that he had ever had with Shap.

“Think it all over, you will see that I am right. Look at this paragraph again in the ‘Evening Post,’ does it not bear out what I say?”

The paragraph in the evening paper to which the Man in the Corner was pointing, read as follows:

“Among the passengers on the Dutch liner *Stadt Rotterdam* is Mr. Felix Shap, the hero of a recent celebrated case. He is returning to Batavia having, through a misadventure which has remained an impenetrable mystery to this day, been deprived of all the proofs that would have established his claim to a substantial share of the profits in the Shap Fuelettes Company. Fortunately, Mr. Shap had enlisted so many sympathies in England that his friends had no difficulty in collecting a considerable sum of money, which was presented to him on his departure in the form of a purse and as a compensation for the ill-luck which has attended him since he set foot in this country. Mr. Shap will now be able to take abroad with him the assurance that British public opinion is always on the side of the victims of an adverse and unmerited fate.”

“Yes!” the funny creature concluded with a cackle. “Until the victims are found out to be rogues. Mr. Felix Shap and his friend Mr. Julian Lloyd will be found out some day.”

The next moment he had gone with that rapidity which was so characteristic of him, and I might have

52 THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER

thought that he was just a spook who had come to visit me, whilst I dozed over my cup of tea, only that on the table, by the side of an empty glass, was a piece of string adorned with a series of complicated knots.

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